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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000119

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SA](#) [SY](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL REVIEWS IRAQ'S RELATIONS WITH
NEIGHBORS

REF: BAGHDAD 0118

Classified By: Acting DCM Gary A. Grappo, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with DCM January 12, senior MFA advisor Mohammed al-Haj Hamoud asked for USG help in improving Iraq's relations with its neighbors and in defending its interests. Regarding Iran, he noted a host of contentious issues that went beyond the current disputed border area at Faka oil field, including disputed areas along the extent of the entire land and maritime borders, as well as internal interference. Moving quickly to other neighbors, he cited water problems with Turkey and other problems with Jordan, but noted that relations with both were overall positive. Problems with Syria and Saudi Arabia were more serious and intractable, he noted. End Summary.

IRAN, TURKEY, AND JORDAN

¶2. (C) In a meeting with DCM January 13, senior MFA advisor Mohammed al-Haj Hamoud reviewed Iraq's relations with key neighbors and asked for USG help in improving these relations. (Other issues, relating to Chapter VII, reported reftel.) Regarding Iran, he noted a host of contentious issues that went beyond the current disputed border area at Faka oil field, including the whole extent of land and maritime borders, as well as internal interference. Moving quickly to other neighbors, he cited water problems with Turkey and other problems with Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Pressed by the DCM about his reference to problems with Jordan, Haj Hamoud acknowledged they were the best of the group, but reiterated that problems remained. He pointed to the need for better security cooperation, since most of the foreign fighters who came into Iraq from Syria transited Jordan before reaching Damascus. (COMMENT: Post does not believe this to be correct.) He also noted "humanitarian" problems with the Jordanian treatment of Iraqi refugees in Jordan.

SYRIA

¶3. (C) Regarding Syria, Haj Hamoud described the actions that the GOI took after the August 19 bombings as "hasty and without justification." In his view, the GOI "regrets" those actions now, but it was having difficulty persuading the Syrians to move on. He noted that such messages were being passed to the Syrians "indirectly," for example during the recent visit of ISCI leader Ammar Abdul-Hakim to Damascus, but so far to little avail. Syrian President Bashar al-Asad had told Hakim that the Iraqis had "committed a crime against Syria and Iraq needs to find a solution." So the Syrians "are waiting," according to Haj Hamoud's recounting of the conversation with al-Hakim.

SAUDI ARABIA

14. (C) Haj Hamoud said there was little hope for improvement in relations with Saudi Arabia until after the elections, when "maybe something could change." He also noted that senior Iraqi officials were concerned about the recent prolonged visit of Asad to Riyadh (possibly with Egyptian President Mubarak joining). In their view, such a meeting possibly signaled neighbors "plotting against Iraq." Haj Hamoud acknowledged that the Saudis had recently returned 40 Iraqi prisoners to Iraq, a small step forward. He welcomed any USG suggestions for possible informal mediation -- perhaps through the good offices of another appropriately situated Gulf neighbor -- with the Saudi leadership that could improve the relationship. DCM underscored that USG officials make it a point in nearly every meeting with the Saudis to press for better relations with Iraq and the return of the Saudi ambassador to Baghdad.

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